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ABSTRACT

Most young children are exuberant and enthusiastic about their futures, believing they can do almost anything. But many eventually lose hope. Efforts to understand at what developmental point children lose hope is the focus of this paper. Students in grades 1 through 12 (N=990) who attend Catholic and public schools were administered the Children's Hope Scale or the Young Children's Hope Scale for the purpose of determining the relationship of the variables of age, ethnicity, and gender to hope as measured by those scales. Results show a significant difference in the levels of hope between Catholic and public school students, with Catholic school students scoring higher on total hope and on the agency sub scale. Other analyses suggest, however, that this difference may only hold for grades 1 through 5. No significant findings relation to the criterion variables were evident for the public school sample, but among Catholic students a significant main effect was found for ethnicity and age on total hope scores, with African American students reporting higher levels of overall hope than their Caucasian peers. Age also was a factor, with a steady decline evident in students' agency as they age. (RJM)

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A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Hope in Children and Adolescents

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Abstract

A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Hope

In Children and Adolescents

Nine-hundred and ninety students from Catholic and public schools, grades 1 through 12, both male and female, and of all ethnic groups, were administered the Children's Hope Scale or the Young Children's Hope Scale for the purpose of determining the relationship of the variables of age, ethnicity, and gender to hope as measured by those scales. A significant difference was found in levels of hope between Catholic and public school students, with Catholic school students scoring higher on total hope and on the agency sub scale. While no significant findings related to the criterion variables were evident for the public school sample, among Catholic students, a significant main effect was found for ethnicity and age on total hope scores. On the measure of agency, significant main effects were found for ethnicity and age. An interaction was found between age and ethnicity when the pathways sub scale was used as the criterion variable. Recommendations are made for continued research.

A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Hope in Children and Adolescents

Teachers, counselors, school personnel, in fact, any individuals who have contact with youth today in the United States are aware that young people are experiencing problems in greater magnitude than perhaps at any time in this country's history. More children are growing up in single parent families, crime and substance abuse continue to be major problems, and the split between those who have a great deal and those who have little appears to be widening. Education, usually seen as a way out of poverty and a means to better oneself, is often unaffordable and seen by those who have little as unattainable. Furthermore, advanced training has come to be expected if young people are to be truly successful. To raise one's status in the socio-economic spectrum takes great determination and the odds seem unlikely to those youth who begin at the bottom. Indeed, it takes hope in order to even attempt the climb to success and achievement.

The poor and minorities are groups who have attracted special attention in recent years as the debate over welfare heightens. Professionals who work in the social service system are aware that the cycle of poverty and hopelessness is a difficult one to break. Hopelessness begets hopelessness. But people are not born hopeless, no matter into what environment they are delivered. Most young children are, in fact exuberant and enthusiastic about their

prospects, believing they can do almost anything (Snyder, 1994). At what developmental point does their positive outlook break down? Might this developmental stage be different for one ethnic group versus another, or for one sex versus the other? The purpose of the present research is to begin answering these questions, with the eventual goal of developing age appropriate interventions to help prevent diminishing hope.

The concept of hope is defined by C.R. Snyder (1994) as a social psychological construct comprised of goals, willpower, and waypower. Snyder (1994) defines hope as the sum of mental willpower and waypower that individuals have directed toward their goals. In order to understand the meaning of this statement, one must understand the meaning of each of these cognitive functions. Snyder defines goals as any object, experience, or outcome that we imagine and desire in our minds. While goals may be concrete or vague, simple or complex, their attainment falls somewhere between impossibility and certainty.

Two components of hope, willpower and waypower, must be present in order to work toward the attainment of goals. Willpower, a cognitive function is defined by Snyder (1994) as a reservoir of determination and commitment we call upon to move us in the direction of our goals. Thoughts and messages associated with high willpower are "I can do it" and "I can succeed".

A second characteristic of hope is waypower, defined by Snyder (1994) as mental capacity we call on to find one or more effective ways to reach our goals. Goals and waypower are closely linked, since clearly established goals enhance waypower. Waypower is also increased by previous efforts to overcome obstacles to the achievement of one's goals. Hope then, is the sum of mental waypower and willpower individuals bring to the attainment of their goals.

Hope is a measurable characteristic. The Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., in press), and the Young Children's Hope Scale (McDermott et al., 1996) have all been developed and used with a substantial number of subjects. Scores derived from the Children's Hope Scale and the Young Children's Hope scale were used as the dependent variable. Catholic school and public school students ages 6 to 18, both male and female and from Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Caucasian ethnic groups comprised the subject pool. The purpose of the research was to determine whether differences exist in hope scores as a function of a student's ethnic group

membership, gender, or age. If hope scores are found to differ or be lower for one or more groups, or to decline at any particular age, then interventions can be developed specifically to target that group and age.

Method

Participants

Students from both public and Catholic schools, grades 1 through 12, participated in this study. There was a total N of 990 usable cases. Catholic and public school data are presented and analyzed separately, since a significant difference was found to exist on the hope scores between the two types of schools.

Five hundred seventy-eight students were from Catholic schools: 283 male and 295 female. Participants from public schools numbered 412, 210 male and 202 female. African-American male students numbered 74, female students 102, with a total of 176. For Caucasian students the total was 689, with males numbering 352 and females 337. Native American students comprised 61 total, with males numbering 31 and females 30. The total for Hispanic students was 26, 16 males and 10 females. The Asian group had 9 individuals, 5 males and 4 females. Students who listed more than one ethnic group were put into a multiethnic category. The total for that group was 29, with 15 males and 14 females. For the present analysis all groups except Caucasian and African-American were found to be too small to form separate categories, and were combined to form an "other" group.

Instrumentation

The Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., in press) and the Young Children's Hope Scale (McDermott et al.,1996) were used as the dependent measures in this study. The Children's Hope Scale demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of .82 in the present study, and Snyder and colleagues (in press) have obtained similar ratings of internal consistency. More information is available in Snyder's (1994) The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get

There from Here. The Young Children's Hope Scale is still in the development stage, however the internal consistency for this scale in the present study was .65.

In addition to the scales, a brief demographic sheet was included which asked for the studentÕs age, gender and ethnic group. Some additional questions were asked to determine family composition, but these data were not included in this analysis.

Procedure

Students were tested in their classrooms as a group. A minimum of four researchers administered the instruments to each class. One researcher read the instructions and the test items while the others observed the students, answered questions, and generally made certain the forms were being filled out correctly. The student and teachers were informed in advance that testing would take place, and all faculty and students appeared to be cooperative.

Results

A preliminary t-test was used to determine whether differences existed between public school and Catholic school students on the dependent variables of (1) total hope, (2) agency, and (3) pathways. Despite efforts to equate the samples on socio-economic status, significant differences between the public and Catholic schools were apparent on the total hope scores, $t(774) = 2.9$, and on the agency subscale scores, $t(795) = 2.41$. Thus, separate analyses were conducted on the two samples for all three variables to maintain consistency.

Three multiple regression equations were used where criterion variables were total hope scores, agency scores, and pathways scores. The independent variables were age, ethnic group, and gender. Only the total model for the Catholic schools was able to explain a significant proportion of variance using the three independent variables. The proportion of variance explained by the full models when hope total was the criterion variable were .9 and .4 for Catholic and public schools respectively. Similarly, the proportion of variance

explained by the full models when agency was the criterion variable were .7 and .4 for Catholic and public schools respectively. Finally, the proportion of variance explained by the full models when pathways was the criterion variable were .7 for Catholic schools and .3 for public schools. Because the only significant findings involved the Catholic school sample, those results will be given for the purposes of this presentation.

A significant main effect was found for ethnicity, F (4, 573) = 11.54, $p < .0001$, and for age, F (4, 573) = 11.53, $p < .0001$, where total hope score was used as the criterion variable for Catholic schools. African-American students were highest in total hope, followed by the other ethnicity group and by the Caucasian group. See figures 1 and 2 for a graphic representation of these data.

Similarly, when the agency subscale score was the criterion variable, there was a significant main effect for ethnicity, F (4, 573) = 9.52, $p < .0001$, and for age, F (4, 573) = 9.52, $p < .0001$, in the Catholic school sample. African-American students' agency sub scale scores were highest, followed by other ethnicity and by Caucasian students. Figures 3 and 4 visually depict these data.

A significant interaction was found between age and ethnicity when the pathways score was used as the criterion variable for the Catholic schools sample, F (9, 568) = 4.86, $p < .0001$. Generally, Caucasian students displayed a steady decline from age 7 onward, with the greatest decline apparent from ages 7 to 10. African-American and other ethnicity students were more variable in their scores, although a gradual decline appears characteristic between ages 6 and 12 for African-American students. Figure 5 visually depicts this data.

Discussion

One of the major findings of this study was that students enrolled in Catholic schools score higher on the Children's and Young Children's Hope Scales. There is reason to suggest, because of other analyses, that this difference may only hold for grades 1

through 5. We suspect there may be a variety of reasons for the higher scores found in this age group of Catholic school students. In selecting our samples, we attempted to equate the public and Catholic schools on socio-economic status to rule out the factors related to family income. It is possible that the higher scores may be related to the greater discipline and somewhat smaller student-teacher ratio we found in Catholic school classrooms. These students simply appeared to pay better attention to the task. Another factor may be parental expectations placed on students who attend a school where families must pay tuition.

In terms of the significant findings, among the Catholic students surveyed, African-American students reported higher levels of overall hope than their Caucasian peers. On the agency subscale specifically, ethnic differences were apparent, with African-American students reporting higher levels of agency. These findings are consistent with Graham's (1994) conclusions on the self-perceptions of ability among African-American students. She noted, "Black subjects maintain undaunted optimism and positive self-regard even in the face of achievement failure" (p. 103). Pajares and Kranzler (1995) reported similar findings in their study examining mathematical self-efficacy among students of different ethnic groups.

In terms of age, our findings indicate a decline in students' agency as they age. A steady decline is apparent from ages 6 to 8, and a more gradual decline characterizes the data from ages 9 to 14. These findings indicate a potential need for interventions geared toward maintaining high levels of hope as children reach those critical ages.

Ethnicity appears to be related to the rate of decline in pathways as students age. Caucasian students displayed a greater drop in pathways between the ages of 7 and 10 and between 11 and 14. African-American and other ethnicity students were more variable in their scores, although a gradual decline appears characteristic between ages 6 and 12 with African-American students.

Further work is indicated before more definite conclusions can be drawn about hope and its relationship to ethnic group and age. Other ethnic groups need to be studied as well

as larger samples from each age and grade. The work reported in this paper serves as a good beginning for the examination of an important and timely topic. The eventual goal is to develop a body of knowledge about how all children can be helped to grow to their full potential as productive members of society.

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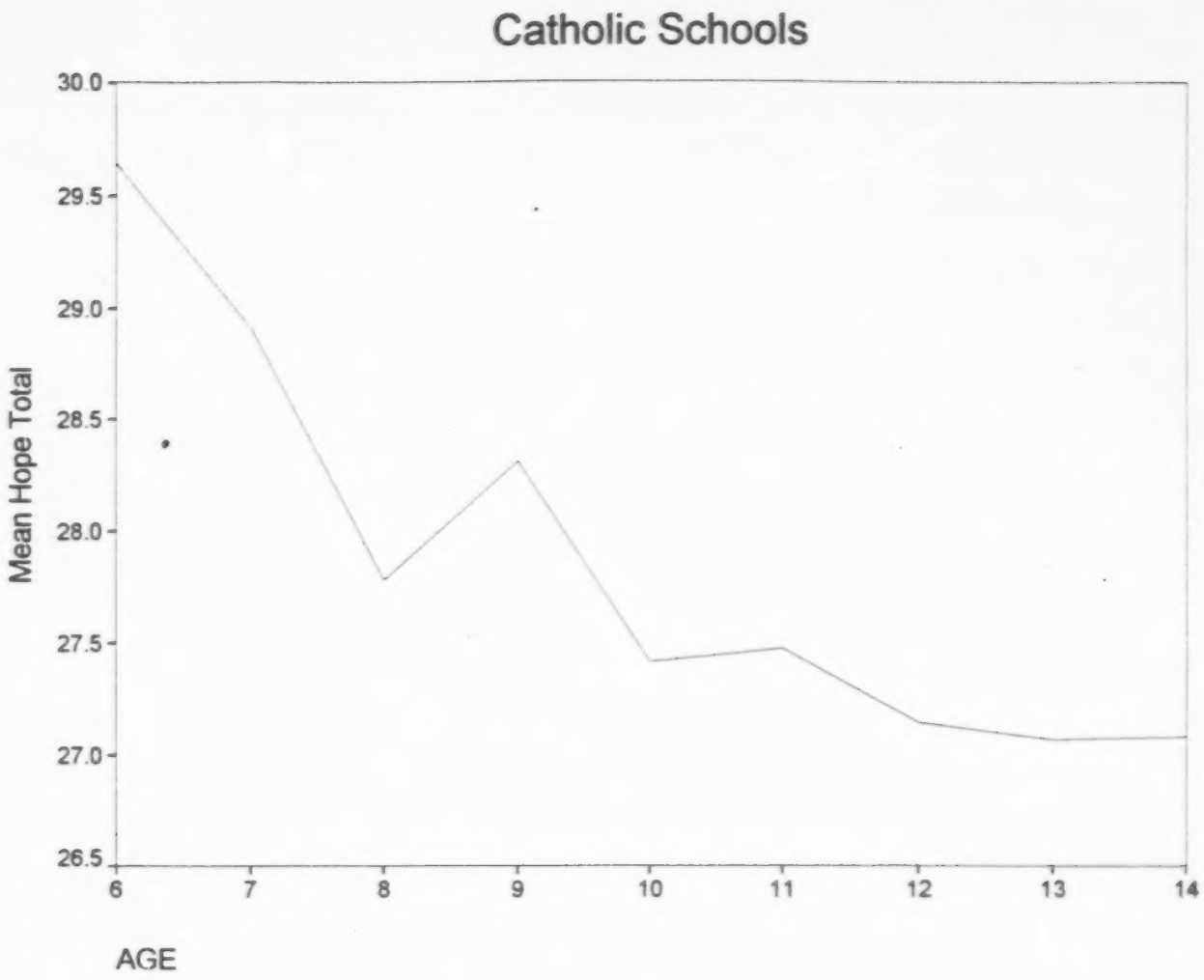

Figure 1. Mean Hope Scale scores for Catholic school students, age main effect.

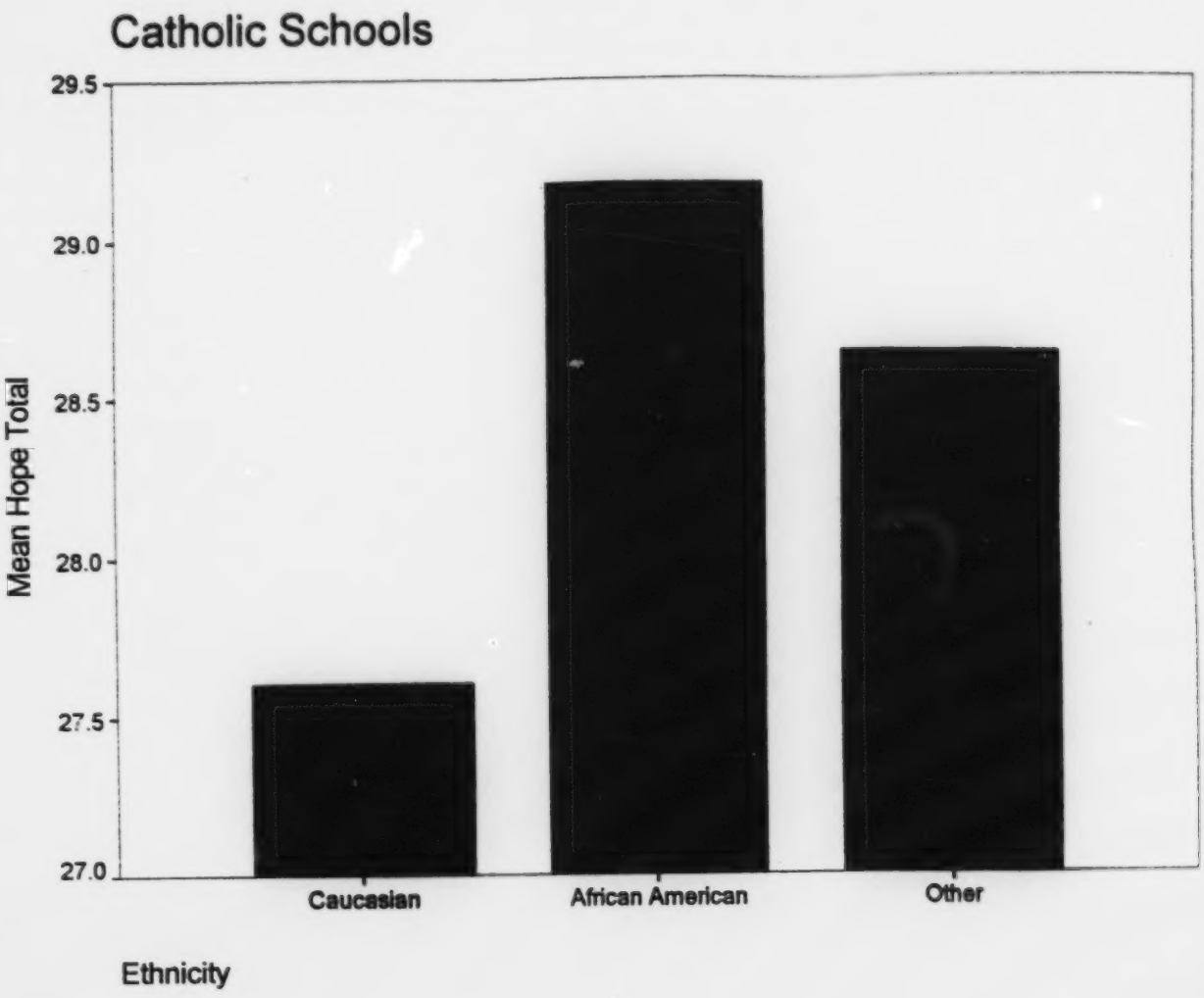

Figure 2. Mean Hope Scale scores for Catholic school students, ethnicity main effect.

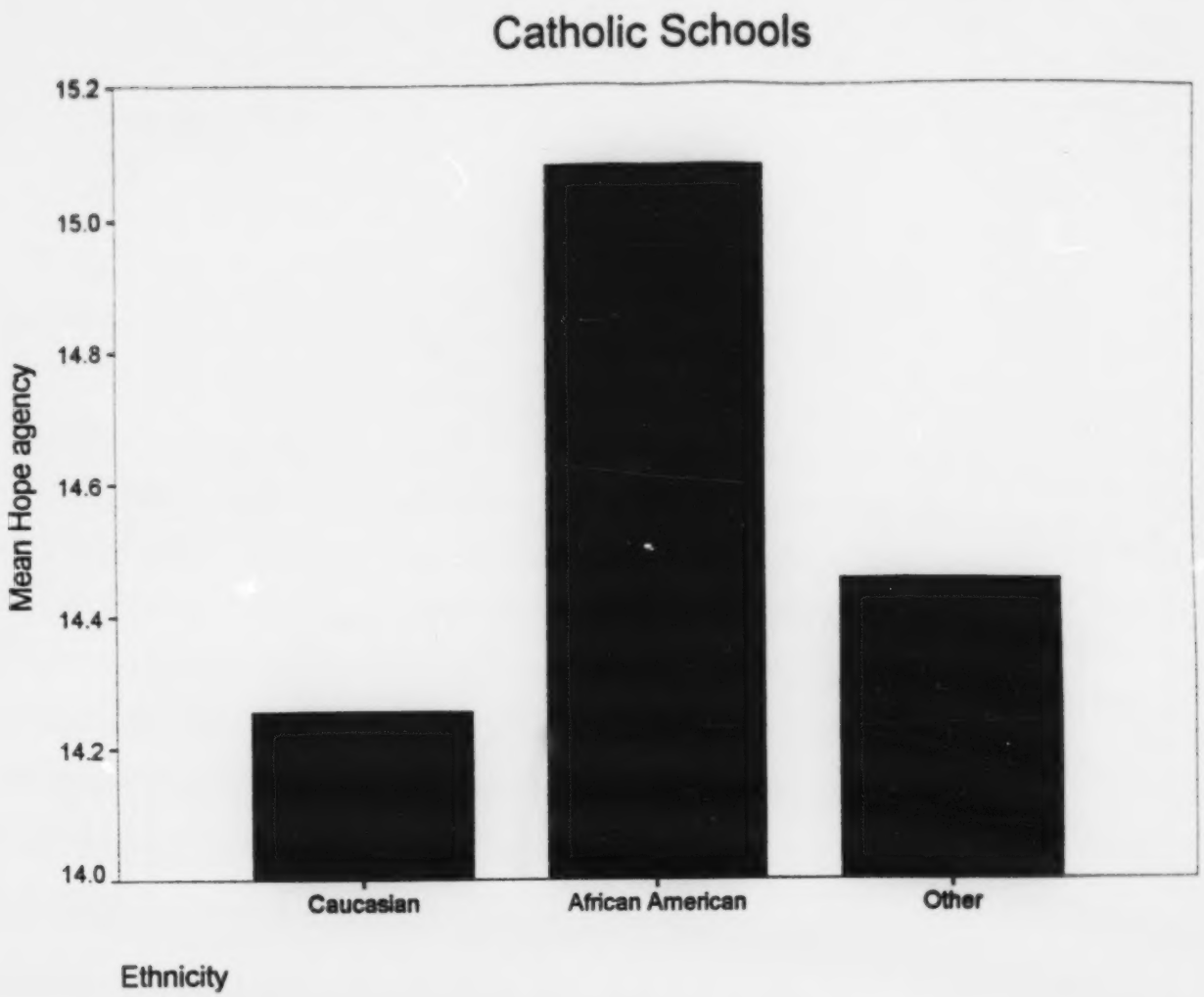

Figure 3. Mean Agency scores for Catholic school students, ethnicity main effect.

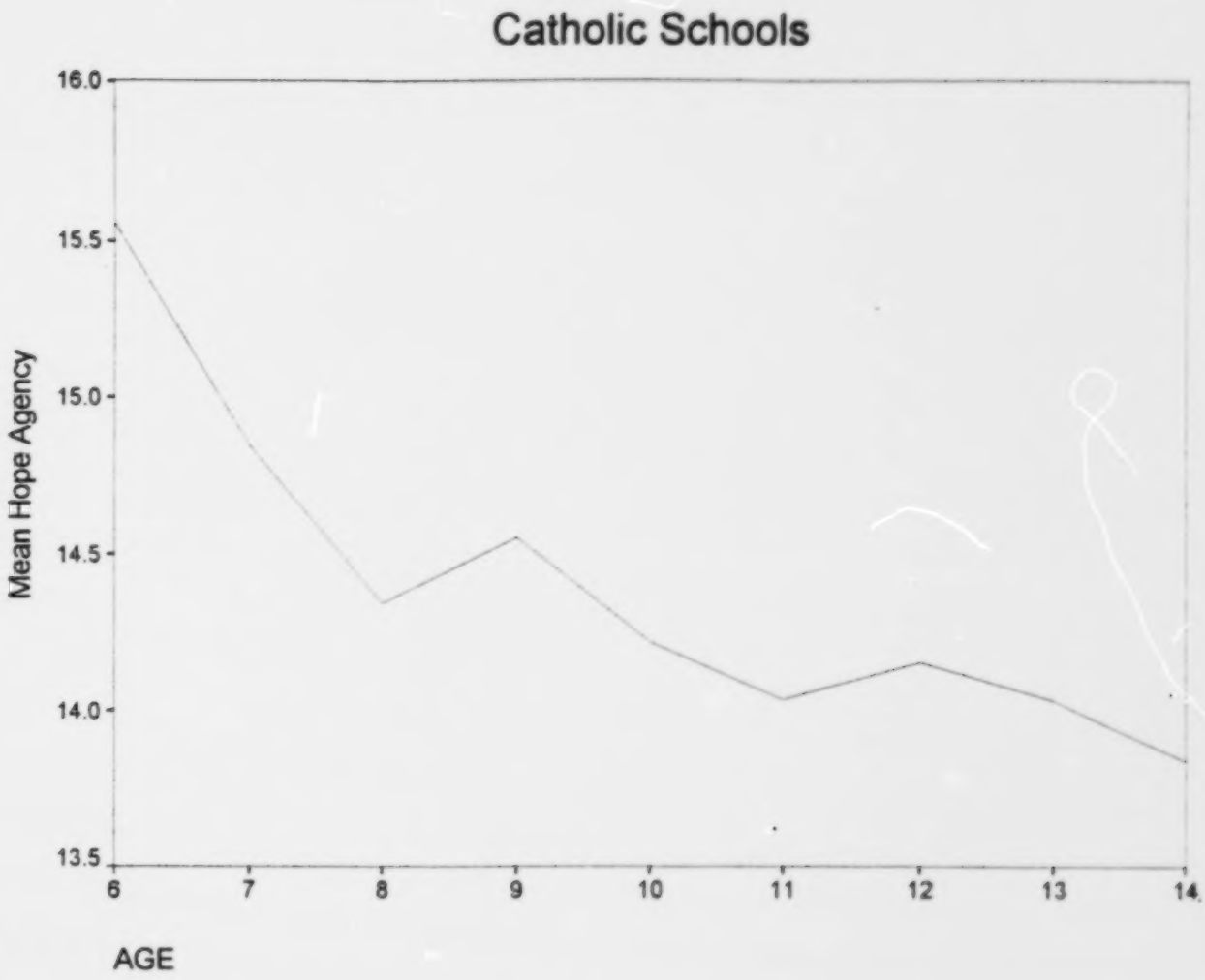

Figure 4. Mean Agency scores for Catholic school students, age main effect.

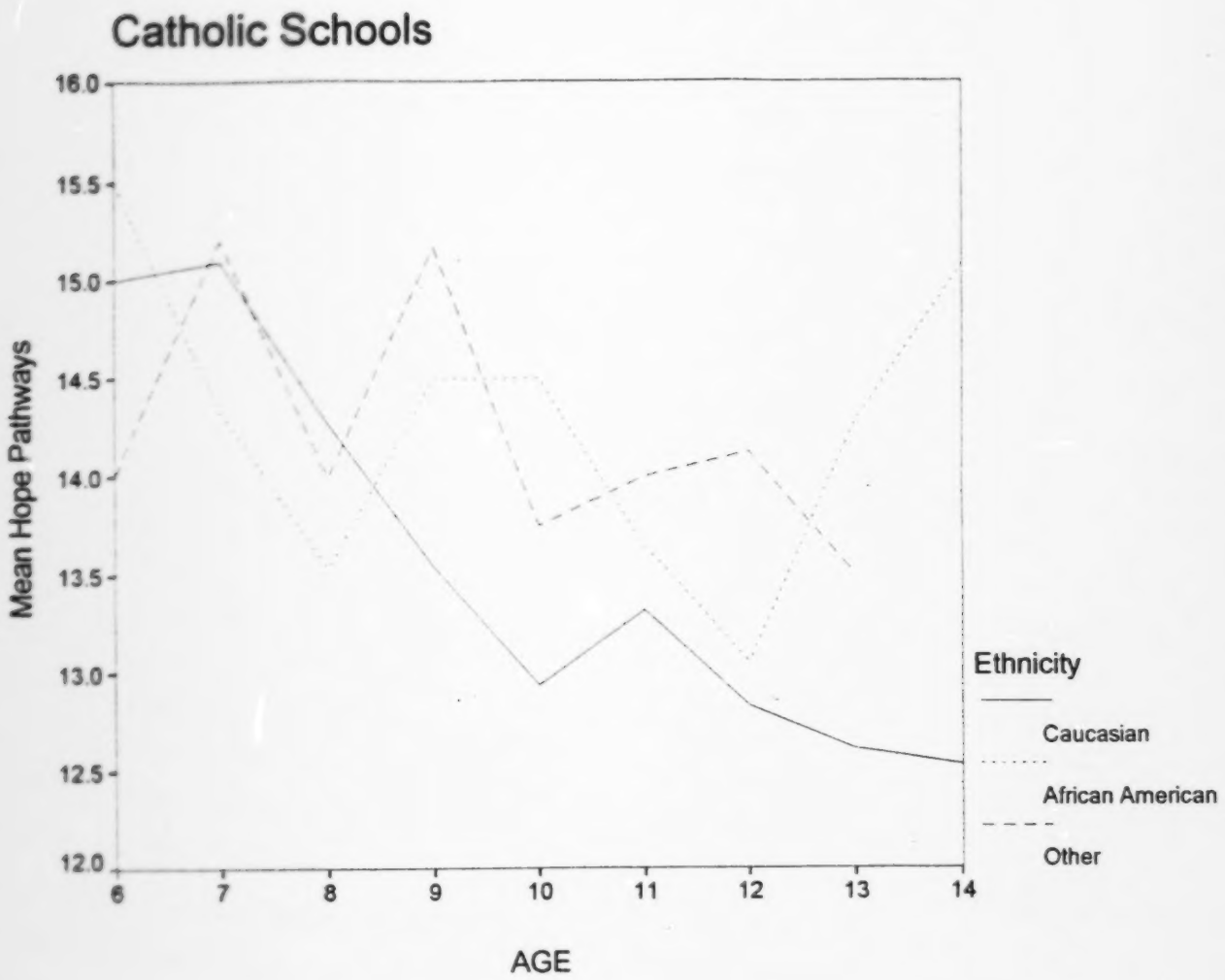

Figure 5. Mean Pathway scores for Catholic school students, age x ethnicity interaction.